

Decoying a "Bad Man"

Stories of the Greatest Cases in the Career of Thomas Furlong, the Famous Railroad Detective, Told by Himself

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Thomas Furlong

I have always believed the "Bad Man" to be largely a myth, so far as courage is concerned, and I think I demonstrated this theory of mine in the following instance, which happened while I was chief of the secret service of the Missouri Pacific railway, one of whose leased properties was the Missouri, Kansas & Texas.

In the year 1882 the memory of the James brothers was still green in the regions of their exploits. Though Frank James was then living the life of a good citizen in Tennessee, and Jesse, his brother, was also in that state, the rumor of their presence in any of the parts where they had operated was enough to raise a scare. Especially was this the case in the eastern portion of the state of Oklahoma, then known as the Indian Territory, which had been the scene of many holdups and brutal murders.

In the year above-mentioned I received a telegraphic dispatch from Colonel Eddy, the general manager, instructing me to proceed to Vinita at once, to investigate a murder which had occurred there, and to prosecute all persons connected with the crime.

On the night of September 13, as a northbound passenger train was being shunted upon the main line from a siding about a mile north of Vinita, two men climbed upon the front platform of the smoker. "Chick" Warner, the conductor, saw them and opened the door. Without a word one of the men drew a revolver of small caliber and fired at Warner's head, the bullet passing through his cheek and inflicting a painful wound. The man who had fired was immediately shot and killed by his companion, his dead body falling across the platform of the car. The name of the murderer was John Barnes Sweeney, and he had formerly been a resident of Clay county, Missouri.

When I arrived at Vinita I learned from the express agent there that Sweeney, after shooting his companion, had returned to the station and informed him that the train had been held up by the James brothers and an outlaw named Ed Miller. Sweeney stated that the gang had been camping in the brush on Little Cabin creek, about four miles northeast of the spot where the train murder occurred, that he had known all the members of the gang before coming to the Indian Territory, having been born in Clay county, near the former home of the James boys, and that he was connected with them by blood. When the gang encamped on Little Cabin creek, Sweeney continued, he himself was staying with his sister on a neighboring farm. The James brothers had told Sweeney that they intended to hold up and rob a number of trains on that line, and had invited him to join them. Sweeney said that he was an expert rifle-shot, and that for this reason he would have been valuable to the gang. He had accepted the invitation for the purpose of causing their arrest, and the man whom he had shot dead was Ed Miller.

Inquiry showed that the man who had been killed by Sweeney had put in an appearance at Vinita only a few days before the shooting. He was looking for a job, and in the course of his search, had gone to the farm of Sweeney's brother-in-law, who owned the farm near Little Cabin creek, where the outlaws were alleged to have had their camping place. The brother-in-law needed help in his cornfield, and employed the stranger, who appeared to be a Scandinavian, and spoke English very poorly. Sweeney had made the man's acquaintance there and, it was believed, had induced him to assist in a holdup, and had supplied him with the revolver of small caliber, almost a toy, with which he had shot the conductor, and which had been picked up near the scene of the tragedy.

Sweeney was a man of sinister reputation. He was of middle height, about thirty years of age, with black, luxuriant hair, and the drooping mustache which the "bad men" affects. Like most "bad men" he was a coward and a braggart. He was lithe and agile, and never failed to talk of his wonderful marksmanship with revolver and rifle. In Clay county, Missouri, he had passed for a horse thief, a treacherous coward, and a notorious liar. He had been arrested and tried for the murder of a reputable farmer, who was shot dead one evening while sitting on the porch of his house with his infant in his arms. The shot was fired from a hedge across the road, and Sweeney had been seen going toward the farmer's house a short time before the murder occurred, and returning afterward, carrying a rifle on both occasions. He was known to have threatened the man's life; but, since there was no direct evidence against him, he was acquitted. The episode had made Sweeney so unpopular, however, that he had been forced to leave Clay county and make his home with his sister and her husband near Little Cabin Creek, Indian Territory.

It was evident to me that, whatever greater degree of guilt might rest with Sweeney, he had been lying to the express agent. The dead man could not have been Ed Miller, as Sweeney declared, because Miller had been killed while attempting to rob a bank in a little town in Missouri. I knew, too, that the James boys were living reputable lives in Tennessee, and that Dick Little, another member of the old-time gang, was in another section of the country. Accordingly I resolved to arrest Sweeney, on the charge of having murdered the dead man, and also for having shot and seriously wounded Conductor Warner; there was some uncertainty as to whether the dead man had done the shooting or not, and Sweeney's arrest on both charges would at any rate suffice to hold him pending inquiries.

During the afternoon preceding the affair Sweeney had been at Vinita, and, while standing on the platform of the railway station there, he had seen a special train go by. The telegraph operator had informed the men on the platform that Colonel Eddy, the general manager, was aboard her. This furnished me with an idea which I put into operation when subsequently arresting Sweeney.

The chief of the United States Indian police at this time was Capt. Sam Sixkiller, a full-blooded Cherokee Indian, living at Muskogee. The Indian police was a federal organization, and consisted of Indians of good reputation, whose duty was to patrol the Indian Territory. They were armed and mounted, and were there to protect the law-abiding Indians and other residents and their property, especially from the whiskey peddlers, of whom there were a number plying their nefarious trade, selling the Indians cheap whisky at exorbitant prices, which was prohibited by the federal laws governing the Indian Territory. Sixkiller had authority to arrest any person charged with a crime on sight, and accordingly I telegraphed him, requesting him to meet me at Vinita for the purpose of arresting Sweeney, without, however, mentioning the man's name.

The reply, which came from Sixkiller's physician, stated that Sixkiller was ill in bed with a fever. I thereupon called up Luke Sixkiller, the chief's brother, who resided at Vinita and was a member of the police force, requesting him to accompany me to Sweeney's house.

Luke Sixkiller was horrified at my proposal.

"Why," he said, "this man Sweeney is a terror. He is a wonderful shot with either rifle or pistol, and he will take at least a half dozen men, well armed, to capture him. He is a desperate man, and we will have to wait until the chief gets well enough to come and help take him."

I had been accompanied to Vinita by William H. Bonnell, one of my most trusted assistants, a little man, but noted for his fearlessness. Upon learning of the defection of Luke Sixkiller, Bonnell at once asked permission to join me in the arrest of Sweeney. After sleeping over the proposition, however, I decided to make the arrest single-handed. I had seen Sweeney a year before in Kansas City, when the man was pointed out to me by an officer, but I felt sure that Sweeney would not recognize me, and that I could take him by a stratagem, if I went single-handed, whereas, if I were accompanied by my assistant, Sweeney would become suspicious of our motives and would open fire. I knew that the "bad man" becomes a very good man indeed when he is confronted by a man over whom he has no treacherously acquired advantage. Bonnell demurred strongly, fearing for my life, but I refused to allow him to join me.

I hired a horse from a livery stable

and started for the farm, reaching the house about 9:30 in the morning, after passing through three miles of undergrowth along the banks of Little Cabin creek. It was a dangerous ride, for if Sweeney had been in ambush he could have shot me at almost any place in that dense brush timber. When I emerged on the open field which formed the approach to the farmhouse, I saw the building about one hundred feet away, and Sweeney seated upon the porch in plain sight, with a Winchester rifle leaning against the wall at his side. At that distance I would have been an easy mark even for an inexperienced marksman.

There was a gate to the field, and it was necessary to let down one of the bars and crawl through, leaving the horse tethered. I entered the field, and hardly had I passed the gate when Sweeney shouted to me to throw up my hands, at the same time rising and covering me with the rifle.

"Who are you and what do you want?" he yelled, as I came to a halt. "My name is Foster," I answered. "and I want to see Mr. John B. Sweeney."

"I am John B. Sweeney. What do you want with me?" demanded the man on the porch, still covering me with the rifle.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Sweeney," I replied, "but is that gun loaded?" "What do you think I would be doing with this gun if it wasn't loaded?" shouted Sweeney, adding an oath.

"Well, if it is loaded, I wish you would turn it in some other direction," I said patiently. "That horse that I have down there is one that I borrowed from the livery man at Vinita to ride over here on, and if that gun were to go off accidentally it might scare him and cause him to break loose, or maybe hurt me. If the horse got away I would have a lot of trouble catching him, and if I didn't catch him the liveryman would make trouble for me. Besides, I didn't come over here to get shot, anyway. If I had expected that there was going to be any shooting I wouldn't have come."

"Then what did you come for?" demanded Sweeney.

"Why, it's this way," I answered. "Colonel Eddy, the general manager of the M. K. & T., went south last night, passing through Vinita on his special train, and he wired me in cipher from Eufaula, asking me to come out here and see John B. Sweeney and request him to come over to Vinita and meet him on his return north to Parsons. He said in the message that he expected to arrive at Vinita about 11:30 today, and that he wanted to have a private talk with you to arrange with him for your services in assisting in the capture of the parties implicated in the holdup that occurred at Vinita a few days before. If you are Mr. Sweeney, and will accompany me back to Vinita, we will just about have time, by starting soon, to reach there before Colonel Eddy's train arrives. The colonel does not want the people at Vinita to know that you have met him," I added, "because he has been led to understand that the people of that town do not like you, so his plan is to run his train onto the siding about a



JOHN B. SWEENEY.

quarter of a mile from Vinita, and we can leave our horses at the livery stable and walk to the side track, each of us taking a different direction, and thus the people will know nothing about your having met the colonel."

"I know them fellows at Vinita are all afraid of me," answered Sweeney, "and if Colonel Eddy will give me a job and pay me enough I can get those train robbers for him. I'll go with you."

During this colloquy Sweeney's brother-in-law, the owner of the farm, had come out of the house and stood, an interested spectator, upon the porch. Sweeney turned to him.

"Go and put the saddle on Baldy, will you?" he asked.

He lowered his rifle, which had been aimed at me during the whole of my speech.

"Come up and take a seat here on the porch," he said. "I'll go up and get ready."

He took his rifle and went upstairs,



"I BEG YOUR PARDON, MR. SWEENEY, BUT IS THAT GUN LOADED?"

while I waited. Now that the strain of this stratagem was over, I was conscious of a burning thirst. I called Sweeney's sister and asked her to give me a drink of water. Hardly had I swallowed this when Sweeney reappeared in the doorway. He had left the Winchester in the house, but in its place he had brought his nine-inch .45 Colt six-shooter.

"Well," he said, suspiciously, "now that you have found the way here you can get on your horse and lead the way back again."

While he was speaking his brother brought Baldy around, and Sweeney mounted it, while I went ahead and, after having let down the bars, mounted my own horse. Sweeney motioned to me to lead the way, which I did. While the horses picked their path along the trail that led back through the dense brush, Sweeney rode close behind me, his revolver in his hand, and grew loquacious, telling me how he had practiced shooting with the James gang, and how he had proved to be the best marksman of the lot. He also pointed out a clump of bushes near the path, in which, he said, the gang had been encamped during the period that they had been in the neighborhood.

While I had perfect confidence in the success of my plan, it was not without a distinct sense of relief that I saw the open prairie in front of me and Vinita in the distance. Then I unfolded a proposition to Sweeney.

"I think the best thing for us to do will be to ride to the livery stable and leave our horses there," I said. "Then you had better go direct to my room. It is the corner room in the hotel, and my grip is still there. Meanwhile I will go to the telegraph office and find out from the operator where Colonel Eddy's special train is, and what time it will arrive at Vinita. I don't know how you feel, but I am getting hungry, and if I find that we have time to eat before the special train arrives I will order some food. As soon as I find out what time it will be here I will come straight back to my room and let you know."

Sweeney appeared satisfied as to my bona fides, and, after we had left our horses at the livery stable, he went straight to the corner room at the hotel which I had occupied, while I moved off in the direction of the telegraph office. On the way I had met my aid Bonnell, who had been greatly worried as to the fate of my mission and of myself. Bonnell was, of course, too good a detective to approach me on the street at that juncture. He had seen Sweeney part company with me at the livery stable, and now he followed at a little distance until he received the signal to wait.

I went to the telegraph office, but instead of entering it, walked round the back of the building until I had placed several houses between myself and the hotel. I crossed the street at a point west of the depot and went round to the rear of the hotel, where there was a flight of outside stairs ascending from the back yard to the second floor. On the way I met Bonnell again and signaled to him to follow. Then, with my assistant a little way behind, I ascended this flight and went quietly toward my room. The door stood partly open. Peering through the crevice I saw Sweeney lying upon the bed in his shirt sleeves with his hat, boots and spurs on. He was taking things easy. If he had had any suspicions as to my intentions, these had been completely dissipated by my nonchalant way of letting him go after their arrival at Vinita.

I drew a small double-barreled Remington derringer from my pocket, and, hiding it behind me, entered the room whistling. As Sweeney looked up I suddenly thrust the derringer into Sweeney's mouth, loosening two of his upper teeth.

"Hands up!" I exclaimed, and the "bad man" complied immediately.

With my left hand I unbuckled my captive's belt and removed it. It contained the holster with the Colt. At that moment Bonnell entered. I instructed him to put handcuffs on the prisoner and take him to the calaboose.

When the next train stopped at Vinita there descended from it, not Colonel Eddy, but Captain Sam Sixkiller, who had arisen from his sick bed and gone to Vinita to assist me in making the arrest.

"I wouldn't take him through Muskogee if I were you," said the Indian.

"Why not?" I asked.

"The railroad men there don't like Sweeney," answered the captain. "They've come to the conclusion that he is a fraud, and that it was he and not the other fellow, who shot 'Chick' Warner. They'll probably lynch him if they can get hold of him. 'Chick' is a fine fellow and very popular among the men."

Accordingly we boarded the northward bound train and took Sweeney to St. Louis, transferring there to the Iron Mountain for Little Rock, Arkansas. Here another change was made for the Fort Smith and Little Rock road, and thus Fort Smith, Arkansas, was reached in safety, without any interference on the part of the railroad men.

From the moment of his arrest Sweeney appeared stunned. He did not utter a single word until he was on the St. Louis train, and probably twenty miles north of Vinita. Then, being seated beside Captain Sam Sixkiller in the smoking car, with myself in the seat immediately behind, he turned his head round.

"Mr. Foster," he said, still addressing me by the name which I had given on the occasion of my arrival at the farm house, "I wish you would please show me that gun you stuck into my mouth."

I took the cartridges out of the derringer and handed it to him. The weapon was of .41 calibre, and not more than five inches in length. The prisoner took the pistol and examined it critically. Then, without turning his head again, he handed it back over his shoulder, saying in a disgusted tone of voice:

"I thought it was a foot long!"

Sweeney was in due course lodged in jail at Fort Smith. He was indicted and finally tried, but was acquitted since I was never able to discover the identity of the slain farm hand or the motive for the murder.

Sweeney came into collision with me on an occasion subsequent to this episode. After his release from jail he returned at once to Clay county, Missouri, whence he wrote a letter to Mr. A. A. Talmage, then general manager of the Missouri Pacific railroad, demanding ten thousand dollars immediately, and threatening that if this sum was not received he would blow up the bridge on the Wabash railroad, also stating that he would kill me on sight in any event. This letter being handed to me, I obtained a warrant for Sweeney's arrest and went to his father's farm near Missouri City, Clay county, accompanied by a deputy sheriff. It was night and Sweeney was in bed. My companion and I rapped at the door, which was opened by Sweeney's father.

"We are officers and have a warrant for the arrest of your son 'Barney,'" I said.

At the head of the stairs stood "Barney," shotgun in hand.

"I am here," he shouted, "and I will kill any man who attempts to come up those stairs."

In an instant the deputy sheriff had bounded up, I following him. "Barney" was thrown to the floor and captured without a shot being fired. He was taken to St. Louis and sentenced to three or four years in the penitentiary.

After his release Sweeney held up and tried to rob a Wabash passen-

ger train, in which attempt he was shot through the ankle by a telegraph operator. He received a sentence of fourteen years for this offense. Subsequently he appeared again, as a witness against the New York Life Insurance company in the celebrated Kimmel case. He claimed to have visited a wild part of Oregon with Kimmel, a man named Johnson, and a third person, in search of treasure. Part of the treasure was found, and during a quarrel over its distribution Johnson shot Kimmel dead and Sweeney shot Johnson dead in return.

On reading Sweeney's story in the newspapers, which was almost a repetition of the story of the fake hold-up down in the territory, as related to the express officials and myself, I really sympathized with the attorney who had gone to the trouble and expense of getting Sweeney there, knowing, as I did, that he was absolutely untruthful and unreliable.

Braggart, coward and liar, Sweeney was a typical "bad man."

LINGER ALWAYS IN MEMORY

Childhood Happenings Are Often Recalled With Results Prejudicial to the Mental Health.

"Most of us, looking back to our days of childhood, can recall very little about them, either pleasant or unpleasant. The common assumption has always been that we cannot recall them because they have been completely crowded out of memory by the host of other memory-images accumulated in the intervening years. But lately, as a result of the investigations of a group of scientists to whom has been given the name of psychopathologists, it has been proved that although the happenings of childhood may in truth be almost entirely forgotten as far as conscious recollection is concerned, vivid memory-images of them are nevertheless retained beneath the threshold of consciousness; and, if they are of an unpleasant nature, may act like an irritant of the nervous system to undermine the health.

"Time and again the beginnings of annoying and distressing nervous symptoms, of strange hysterical attacks, and even of seeming insanity, have been traced to long-forgotten incidents of the early life, the casual connection between the buried memory-image and the symptoms of disease being plainly shown by the disappearance of the latter when the former, by one of several ingenious psychological methods of 'mind-tunneling,' is unearthed and brought once more into conscious remembrance."—H. Adington Bruce, in the Century.

Pays to Feed the Birds.

"It pays, in dollars and cents, to feed the birds," writes Rev. Manley B. Townsend in the Guide to Nature. Every orchard should at regular intervals have suet fastened to the trees as well as bird boxes for nesting purposes. There is pleasure in watching the feeding birds—their beautiful colors, their graceful movements, their engaging ways, to say nothing of gaining their confidence and perhaps persuading them to light upon us and take food from our hand. There is a joy in such companionship, a deep satisfaction in ministering to a dependent life. On Thanksgiving day, as I sat down to dinner, I glanced out of the window into the apple tree. There was a little downy woodpecker at his Thanksgiving dinner of suet (we both had suet pudding that day), and my heart was the lighter and my Thanksgiving the brighter because I had a tiny feathered guest to enjoy my bounty. Try it for yourself and see if this is not so."

Dull Finished Mahogany.

The furniture that we love is the old mahogany that our careful forefathers kept in such good condition that we can enjoy it today. And following their example, we must still keep it in the best of order; but the very high gloss that was liked in some time past on old woodwork is not so much in favor now among people who want enjoyment and use in connection with their heirlooms. To live in dread of finger marks on a polished surface is not to be comfortable. So instead of using much furniture polish on old mahogany, use a very little sweet oil. Apply it sparingly, rub and rub it in. Another good application for dull-finished mahogany is made of two ounces of yellow beeswax dissolved in the same quantity of turpentine. But whatever polish is used, the wood must be thoroughly dusted and rubbed before the application is made.

Unity in Living Room.

A large piece of furniture is often required to create unity in a room. A number of small pieces do not give the same effect. A big davenport would transform a room. It would pull it together and take away the patchy effect it quite likely otherwise had. Among the cheaper davenports there has been a style which is usually upholstered in tapestry, but another material could be chosen at a slight additional expense.

A floor lamp would transform the living room or hall. As soon as it was lighted it would immediately become a friend of the family!

Deadly Stuff.

"Just what is your attitude toward prohibition?"

"One of mild curiosity," answered the temperate citizen.

"What do you mean by that?"

"It interests me to see how much punishment the human system can stand in the form of liquor bought from bootleggers."